

**STATEMENT OF
BRIAN E. LAWRENCE
ASSOCIATE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
OF THE
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JUNE 11, 2002**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the more than one million members of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony regarding the following bills and draft bills: H.R. 3173, the Servicemembers and Military Families Financial Protection Act of 2001; H.R. 3735, the Department of Veterans Affairs Overpayment Administration Improvement Act of 2002; H.R. 3771, to exclude monetary benefits, paid to veterans by states and municipalities, from consideration as income for purposes of pension benefits; H.R. 4042, the Veterans Home Loan Prepayment Protection Act of 2002; the Arlington National Cemetery Burial Eligibility Act; and legislation providing dependency and indemnity compensation to the surviving spouse of a veteran with a totally disabling service-connected cold weather injury for at least one year preceding death.

In accordance with its Constitution and Bylaws, the DAV's legislative focus is on benefits and services for service-connected disabled veterans, their dependents, and survivors. Our legislative agenda is determined by mandates in the form of resolutions adopted by our membership.

Section 2 of H.R. 3173, the Servicemembers and Military Families Financial Protection Act of 2001, increases the maximum monthly lease amount for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act (SSCR) protection from \$1,250 to \$1,950. This important act prevents families of Armed Forces men and women from being evicted from their home for inability to pay full rent. Raising the amount of protection reflects contemporary cost of living rates.

Section 3 of H.R. 3173, provides authority for an optional increase in the maximum coverage under Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) and Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI). A qualified member would be able to elect coverage in the amounts of \$500,000, \$750,000, or \$1,000,000. Currently, the maximum coverage is \$250,000. The DAV has no resolution pertaining to the SSCR, SGLI or VGLI. We recognize that the provisions of this bill are commendable and we would not oppose its enactment.

H.R. 3735, the Department of Veterans Affairs Overpayment Administration Improvement Act of 2002, extends the period for application for a waiver of overpayment of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits, and grants the Secretary authority to waive overpayments in which the cost of recovery would be higher than the amount recovered. The DAV has no resolution regarding waiver of overpayment. The provisions of this bill would enhance the fairness of overpayment recovery and we would not oppose its enactment.

H.R. 3771 would exclude monetary benefits, paid to veterans by states and municipalities, from consideration as income for purposes of pension benefits. Pension provides a supplemental income to keep recipients above the level of poverty. The amount of pension is based on the recipient's annual income level. The ratio of pension to annual income is an inverse equation. Higher income results in lower pension. In determining annual income, this bill would not require that pension be reduced by the amount of income from local governments. Because the DAV is an organization devoted to the well being of service-disabled veterans, we have no resolutions regarding pension programs, which are nonservice connected. It appears this legislation would benefit a large number of veterans, and we will not oppose its passage.

H.R. 4042, the Veterans Home Loan Prepayment Protection Act of 2002, would not allow interest to be charged to veterans once they have made a prepayment in full, on a VA loan guarantee. The DAV would not oppose enactment of this legislation.

Draft legislation would entitle veterans' surviving spouses to receive dependency indemnity compensation (DIC) if the veteran was totally disabled for at least one year prior to death as a result of cold-weather injuries. The DAV would not oppose enactment of this legislation.

The Arlington National Cemetery Burial Eligibility Act, would reform rules regarding eligibility for burial at Arlington, reform rules regarding eligibility for placement in the Columbarium at Arlington, establish regulations for private markers, and authorize a memorial in honor of victims of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The DAV has no resolutions regarding burial at Arlington. We would not oppose enactment of this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present our views on this bill. We appreciate The Subcommittee's efforts to improve the lives of disabled veterans and their dependents.

I will be glad to answer any questions this statement may have inspired.